

## Challenges of Sanitation Workers During Covid- 19

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### Abstract

Sanitation workers have long been marginalized throughout India and overlooked by the authorities and successive governments over the decades. In addition, these workers are not treated well for their work and often became the victims of racial, ethnic, and religious discrimination. Considering the environmental hygiene and cleanliness during the outbreak of the pandemic, the work rendered by the sanitation workers is considered quite critical and significant. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the serious occupational and health risks they already face, leaving many working with limited protection and almost no legal guidance or support. The paper also discusses challenges and measures for improving the conditions of sanitary workers. Indeed, the goals of equality and justice do not stand by the truth in the face of the tragic situation of hand guards within COVID19.

**Key words-** Sanitation workers, Hygiene, Covid-19, Challenges

### Introduction

**S**anitation workers are the backbone of the waste management system, but most of them operate under inhumane conditions - excluding safety and public safety equipment. With corona virus infection (COVID-19) showing no signs of decline, sanitation workers and hand guards are at high risk of exposure. India is home to five million sanitation workers, sewers, sewers and public toilets. They come in direct contact with human waste and toxic gases and are often at risk of chronic diseases. In this Paper, we discuss the challenges faced by the sanitation workers, especially when they are not sufficiently equipped with PPE kits, safety measures and lack of information on health hazards during the pandemic.

Hand skipping is an old tradition, not much talked about at the moment; it is present in the context of the Indians. Even in the difficult times of COVID-19, the manual the robbery continues as before. When life changed around the world as a result of the epidemic and people from all walks of life are experiencing changes in the way they work, with movement and human activities contained and restricted as a result of the epidemic, the snatching of the manual continues, as it was before this epidemic.

This study focuses on the workers condition of hand guards and how COVID-19 has led to the reintroduction of their stigma. Hand skipping is an ongoing practice that persists in India despite the ban on the employment of hand craftsmen. Although there is support laws and policies as well self-renewal, there is a lack of implementation of these laws. In this study, we try to focus on the 'waste products' section of the sanitary workers in India. The process of opening, cleaning and polluting water pipes is a part of sewage that occurs most frequently in urban areas. Finally, several ways to deal with their grief during the epidemic are suggested to change improve the current, sad state of sanitation

### Concept Of Sanitation

Sanitation usually refers to the provision of services and services for the safe disposal of human urine and faces. The term sanitation also means sanitation, with services such as garbage collection and disposal of wastewater. Sanitation is a frustrating topic for an hour on our continent, finding its status as a critical issue. Another alarming fact is that no clear definition of sanitation has been announced by the United Nations system. Different organizations have used different definitions. Meanwhile, when defining a common definition of sanitation, the

"International Year of Sanitation" 2008 provided much-needed impetus as it declared, "Everyone, and that means everyone on earth, has the right to a healthy, dignified life." In other words, everyone has the right to sanitation. Taking this opportunity, the World Health Organization "defines the term, sanitation "as: "Sanitation usually refers to the provision of services and facilities for the safe disposal of human urine and faeces".

### **Operational Definitions of The Concept**

- **A report by the World Bank, the International Labor Organization, Water Aid and WHO from 2019 describes 'sanitation workers' including toilet cleaners and housekeepers, community members and institutions; those who drain holes in pit latrines and swimming rooms and others carry mud; those who clean sewer pipes and pits; and those working in sewage treatment plants and mud dumps.**
- **In the United States, some organizations use this term only for solid Municipal garbage collectors.** A popular example of a 'garbage worker' referring to garbage collectors was the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Workers' Strike, sponsored by Martin Luther King Jr., which included garbage collectors and sewers.

### **Plight Of Sanitation Workers**

Sanitation workers provide an important public service that is important in protecting human health. They are often ostracized, impoverished and discriminated against by members of the community, performing their duties without the resources, protection or legal rights. They are exposed to harmful gases and biological agents and chemicals in septic tanks, sewage pipes, pump stations, and medicinal plants (WHO 2018). Sanitation workers who are not protected by adequate safety and security measures, infections, diseases, mental health problems and death.

The plight of sanitation workers in developing countries has been jointly documented by the International Labor Organization, Water Aid, the World Bank and the World Health Organization to raise awareness of working conditions and to make changes. Extensive research has been conducted

worldwide so far, and it is part of the growing workforce of sanitation workers. Poor sanitation causes up to 432,000 deaths from diarrhea each year and is linked to the transmission of other diseases such as cholera, diarrhea, typhoid, hepatitis A and polio. Sanitation workers are people who perform tasks such as cleaning toilets, disposing of pits and fuel tanks, cleaning sewer pipes and pit holes, and operating pumping stations and treatment centers. They play a vital role in improving the health and well-being of people around the world and have the same right to good health. Waste should be handled properly before disposal or use. However, workers often come in direct contact with human waste, working without the equipment or protection by hand removal that puts them at a long list of health risks and diseases.

### **Importance Of Sanitation Workers In The Society**

Sanitation, hygiene, and hygiene are aspects of the urbane community. Sanitation is essential to health and sustainable economic development. Needless to say, the quality of a person's health depends on better access to sanitation. Providing clean water and better sanitation is important in developing countries. People who are employed by all means to collect household waste, clean sewers and canals, sweep the streets and collect and dispose of human and animal waste, and the animal police are called the sewage service. Collection of waste disposal, open sewers, sewers, open public areas using brooms, metal plates, baskets or buckets without protection. It is dangerous to the health of the workers involved in this sector. At all levels of activity, the most invisible and widely spoken activity in our country is sanitation or waste management, wastewater, sewage and solid waste. Sanitation workers have the lowest level of sanitation services. They repair, inspect, clean and dispose of sewer pipes and, where necessary, go down into pits and into private toilets, without protective equipment or tools.

Sanitation is included in the Sustainable Development Goals (2016) and is fundamental to the fight against poverty. Basic sanitation puts millions of lives at risk; and significantly reduces the impact of other interventions on educational, health, rural and urban development interventions. A lot of

resources have been used to provide sanitation services, but more than 2.5 billion people do not have access to basic sanitation facilities. In many cases, even if new toilets and laundry facilities are built, efficient use remains low and little is available or no profit is made. Indeed, there is growing public awareness that, until sanitation is used properly, both at home and in society as a whole, the desired impact of improved water and sanitation services for public health benefits cannot be achieved.

**Safety Measures**

Sanitation workers have long been marginalized throughout India for their work and racial, ethnic, and religious discrimination. The COVID-19 epidemic has exacerbated the serious occupational and health risks they already face, leaving many working with limited protection and almost no legal guidance or support.

**This paper has revealed common sense:**

- While staff was aware of the symptoms and risks posed by COVID-19, many were ill-equipped to handle these risks, due to a lack of specific guidance or formal training, limited access to protective equipment (PPE), and inadequate hand washing.
- The disease exacerbates existing risks, such as a lack of health insurance or other means of social protection. Although there have been examples in some countries for targeted support for sanitation workers, these have often been slow and limited, leaving most workers to deal with any impact on their lives, incomes and rising costs themselves.
- While there was a further increase in the value of their work at this critical time, the attitude towards employees sometimes changed for the worse. For example, there have been cases of homeowners and neighbors asking for sanitation workers to leave because of the risk of infection.
- The lack of sanitation services - which is very common for female workers - increased the existing risk of workers and became an advocate for the lack of safety net, normal income, insurance cover and access to PPE.
- Ensuring the rigorous implementation of standard operating procedures and emergency sanitation systems operating in sewage lines and flood tanks, ensuring respectable involvement and health and safety of related personnel.
- Review the rules for the construction of ports to ensure that buildings of a certain size are compelled to distribute wastewater and sanitation

systems and all existing safety systems, with clear responsibilities and charges against owners of such infrastructure.

- Improving accountability and responsibilities of officials in the implementation of PEMSAR 2013. Provide incentives for employees to report increased vandalism and rehabilitate affected sanitation workers.
- Ensuring quality education for the children of artisans so that they can access other livelihoods, including the selection of appropriate community services, thus preventing the next generation from engaging in this inhumane practice.
- Evaluate and implement alternative technologies to reduce the risks associated with the work of sanitation, including the provision of support for existing sanitation workers or people who have relied on deceased employees to relocate / manage those different activities.
- Ensuring the provision of social security as a guaranteed income pension for sanitation workers, especially hands-on providers, who are no different from the one-time rehabilitation support service.
- Raising public awareness of the issue of vandalism and sanitation workers' rights, including conducting social research on procedures for involving sanitation workers.

There is a clear need for sanitation workers to get immediate support so that they can cope with the greater risks as the epidemic continues, and more

**Training on COVID-19 by ULBs**

Due to physical distancing constraints, alternate approaches for training and sharing of information with sanitation workers were adopted by ULB officials interviewed. These included:

- Formal training of sanitation workers in small batches, in order to ensure physical distancing
- Training through video calls
- Sharing of information by supervisors with sanitation workers during regular work interactions
- Preparation of videos on different themes and dissemination through WhatsApp.

The most commonly covered topics by ULBs for spreading awareness amongst sanitation workers were use of PPE and hand hygiene. Other

areas which are critical for COVID-19 prevention, such as reuse and disposal of PPE, handling and disposal of waste, and disinfection procedures, were not covered in most cases.

### COVID-19 awareness among sanitation workers

The study examined the level of awareness among sanitation workers. Sanitation workers receive various information surrounding COVID-19 from sources such as employers, television, WhatsApp, Aarogya Setu app and word of mouth. More than 80% of the sanitation staff interviewed was aware of at least two of the symptoms of COVID-19; Common symptoms include colds, coughs and flu. About 95% of sanitation workers they knew at least one measure of prevention. The most commonly used prevention measures included: mask use (69%), hand washing (56%), and walking distance (49%). In a few cases, respondents also mentioned unsubstantiated measures such as drinking hot water, living in a high-temperature environment, and the use of herbal supplements. 60% of sanitation workers knew they had to isolate themselves if they became infected.

### Visual health risks

The study also sought to measure the level of concern for sanitation workers in relation to disease. Most of the employees interviewed were aware of the high prevalence of COVID-19. However, for financial reasons As a result, most of the staff was forced to continue working. Interviews have shown widespread concern about illness, as well as additional financial pressures linked lock. Many respondents also shared concerns about the risk of transmission to their families members. It is possible that this could affect their mental health.

### Concluding Remarks

The living, economic, working and health conditions of the sanitary workers and the level of poverty among their households, apart from the level of dropout. This brings out the fact that the living conditions of the workers in terms of the availability of electricity, drainage facility, kitchen facility, toilet facility and the sources of fuel used for cooking all vary among them on the basis of their gender and nature of employment. The drainage and toilet facility are poor in general and much worse in the female workers. Similarly, the working conditions are worse in the case of the sanitation workers, as

they lack allowances, holidays, sufficient safety gears and others. They do not have a worker's union or the power to protect their rights. As they are involved in the most degrading and demeaning activities, they are looked down upon by the society and this social stigma affects the educational attainment of their children as well. They are not aware about the existence of the welfare programmers and schemes, which calls for the strict implementation of the same for the welfare and benefit of the sanitary workers.

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